

In Annapolis, rhetoric turns purple

■ **Decorum:** *A state senator tackles unseemly Ravensmania in the State House.*

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Let the purple glow atop Baltimore's City Hall. Let it color the decor of a hundred bars and adorn the windbreakers of a million fans.

But please, dear lawmakers, let's control ourselves in Annapolis.

That was the fervent plea yesterday from Sen. Clarence W. Blount, one of the Senate's most distinguished — and most conservatively dressed — members, who berated a few of his purple-clad colleagues for tarnishing the dignity of the august chamber by dressing as if they had just stopped by on their way to the Ravens locker room.

"What's the use of having a Tiffany skylight when we come here and look like we work in a coal mine?" asked Blount, a Baltimore Democrat. "We ought to have a sense of personal pride."

It all started Thursday, when Baltimore Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden asked the senators to dress for yesterday's session mindful of the football team's colors. The Ravens will play the Oakland Raiders for the American Football Conference championship on Sunday, and continue on to the Super Bowl if they win.

Montgomery County Sens. Ida G. Ruben, Jean W. Roesser and Jennie M. Forehand arrived in purple dress suits. (Ruben pointed out that she did not vote for the Ravens' stadium to be built with public funds but wished them well anyhow.) Other female members opted for a subtler show of solidarity, wearing lavender blouses and tiny purple lapel pins. Some of the men had on purple ties or shirts.

But a few members broke out their stadium duds. Sen. Thomas L. Bromwell of Baltimore County wore purple Army-style camouflage pants and a Ravens hat. McFadden wore a Ravens jersey — No. 45, for his district.

At first, the mood in the chamber was jolly. In his opening prayer, the Rev. Jerry Teaford asked for divine intervention on behalf of the team.

Then Sen. Walter M. Baker stood up to make an inquiry. "Would it be appropriate, Mister President, for me to start wearing my bib overalls in here?" the upper Eastern Shore Democrat asked, adding that McFadden's attire was "inappropriate." Midscoed, McFadden slipped his sports jacket over his jersey.

Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller responded calmly: "We make certain exceptions on special occasions, and this is a special occasion."

Miller, known as a natty dresser, was conspicuously purple-free yesterday, but he noted that he and his wife had trawled his closet and tested three different outfits, trying to create a purple-and-black ensemble.

Blount, however, was not amused. While he understands that times change, he said, "Let's don't erode. Once a mudslide starts, it gains momentum — toward the bottom!" Besides, he added, "We are different from the House."

Across the hall, dozens of delegates wore Ravens purple in various forms. Baltimore Del. Ann Marie Doory, wearing the No. 58 jersey of Ravens linebacker Peter Boulware, took the floor to wish the team a trip to the Super Bowl.

House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr. neither condoned nor condemned the departures from sartorial standards. "Obviously, it's not something you would allow to happen pretty often," he said.

Some lawmakers said they thought Blount's comments were

a bit extreme.

"I always respect the dignity of the Senate," said McFadden. "But the Ravens are a Baltimore and a state treasure. I don't think that I'm unduly out of uniform."

Ignorant of the wardrobe squabble downstairs, on the second floor of the State House, Gov. Parris N. Glendening announced that he and California Gov. Gray Davis had bet on the game, with Glendening putting up a bushel of Maryland crabs, and Davis a case of Napa Valley red wine.